



GILA NEWSLETTER

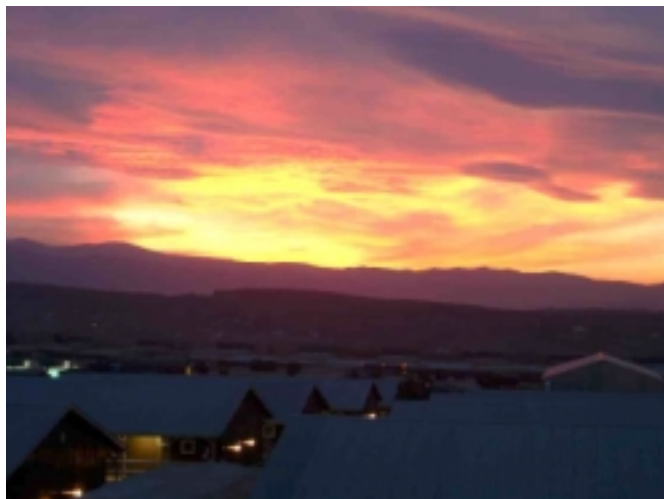
12TH EDITION

August 10, 2002

The Sun Sets on Another Week in Kosovo

Another week rolls by here in Kosovo as we approach the three month mark of our deployment. Although much has been accomplished, there remains a great deal more work to do. Everyday the soldiers within the Gila Task Force display their perserverence. Whether it be the tedious duty of pulling guard along the perimeter of Camp Bondsteel or participating in a border closure mission along the FYROM border. Our broad mission continuously displays the versatility of the engineer soldier.

Apparently some of the rain that was plaguing parts of Germany these past few weeks has found its way to Kosovo. We have seen some fantastic and powerful storms out here. When it rains- it rains!



The skyline during sunset at Camp Bonsteel

Along with the rain we have seen fierce displays of thunder and lightening. A positive light can be derived from such displays of nature; there is never a dull day in Kosovo.

While some of the missions lately have not been short of excitement, our tremendous focus on doing things safely vastly reduces the threat to our soldiers. Safety remains priority number one.

9E Officers Take on Well Rehearsed 1-26 Officers in a Friendly B-Ball Game



With only one practice, a collection of 9E officers challenged a veteran team composed of officers from TF 1-26 to a game of basketball. While the 1-26 team currently plays in a league, this was the first outing for newly created 9E Officers Basketball Team. Yet, despite the lack of experience, 9E played to a hard fought 43-40 loss. Players included: LTC Idlet, MAJ Steele, CPT Stoll, CH Blount, LT Olson, LT Henson, LT Sawser, LT Dunker, LT Anderson. We look forward to the rematch!

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HHC/9E: Headhunters

After the easing pace of last week, this week has seen a significant uptick in optempo. The company operations section is fully engaged with a whole host of issues. Staff Sergeant Inez Armas, the company's supply sergeant, is diligently preparing paperwork for the turn in of various equipment ranging from communications wire to machine guns. The more paperwork we do, the closer to home we seem to get. She is ably aided by the company armorer, Private First Class Evelyn Ramirez, who, when she is not on guard searching females coming on to post, is busy increasing her military education by attending the LOG 73 supply class.

Down here in Kosovo the army provides 100% tuition assistance, and many people are taking advantage of the opportunities. Private First Class Jason Moore, the commander's driver, says "Kosovo is what you make of it" and is taking German 101 to improve his language skills for use upon return to Germany. He is not the only one in the company taking classes down here. With registration for the fall semester underway, the company has seen several dozen tuition assistance forms come through the office for the commander's signature. Specialist Robert Cook, for example, is working towards an associate's degree and has signed up for Astronomy 201 (Exploring the Universe) and Sociology 201 (Marriage and the Family). "It's a wonderful opportunity to further your education," says Cook, "there are fewer distractions [down here]."



Support Platoon poses with their Russian counterparts



Private First Class Moore and Specialist Cook pose while Staff Sergeant Ryan McCorkle buckles down to work in our tactical operations center

This week the company also had two three-hour time blocks at the Small Arms Virtual Trainer. Imagine a video game played on theater-size movie screen, with air-powered weapons simulators. The training is good and effective, and according to Specialist Cook, "the best thing is you don't have to clean your weapon afterward." Support Platoon had the first slot and Maintenance Platoon a second slot the following day. In one of his last official duties before returning to Schweinfurt, Staff Sergeant Eulogio Garcia-Flores led eight soldiers of the Maintenance Platoon through the trainer. Saying good-bye will be hard, and we are going to greatly miss Sergeant Garcia and his incredible personality and character. His replacement, Staff Sergeant Shane Calder, showed up this week. He is moving up the ladder from Bravo Company's Maintenance Team Chief to the Maintenance Platoon Sergeant for HHC. We also have one correction to make from last week's newsletter. Sergeant Nabity was incorrectly identified as working directly with services. In reality, Sergeant Gregory Burrison and his team of Specialist Justin Ellison, Specialist Anthony Elrod, Specialist Anthony Ortiz, and Specialist Norbert Dioso are responsible for ensuring the vehicles are properly inspected prior to being turned over to Brown and Root for servicing.

The last in a long line of good training for the week comes from Support Platoon and the partnership mine training they conducted with the Russians. We had a team of Russian explosive ordinance disposal experts come down from their sector for training on American mine systems. After a long and eventful week, we're looking forward to the weekend. Until next week...Headhunters!





A/9E: Breach Hell!

This week, the Apaches continued their role as “protector of all things good” conducting force protection here on Camp Bondsteel. It is a difficult and stressful time for the soldiers, but they are all holding up well so far. In the soldiers’ free time, many are busy completing their promotion packets and preparing for upcoming boards. Proper time management and professional development are defining traits of some of the up-and-coming leaders showing their faces in Alpha Company.

1st Platoon continued their force protection duties this week. They have done an excellent job in the towers and at gate 3. PFC John Martin received a coin from CSM Beam for his duty performance and knowledge. SSG Labrador and SPC Castaneda are preparing to test/evaluate soldiers who will be competing for the Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB). They have been busy completing their evaluation training and setting up the testing scenarios. 2LT Dunker helped train Charlie Company to prepare for an upcoming mission outside of MNB(E). He trained them on search techniques he learned at the British Unit Search Advisor course.

2nd Platoon has also kept very busy conducting force protection on Camp Bondsteel. SSG Gibson and a group of motivated soldiers have been getting up early to work Gate 3 in the mornings. Recently, members of the platoon were recognized by the BN for their strong performances in various areas. PV2 Wood received a certificate for his preparation during a BN inspection. SSS Gibson, SGT Solomon, PFC Bradley, and 2LT Kutsko were awarded certificates for their performances on the July APFT.



2LT Dunker trains Charlie Company on search techniques

Another week of force protection has come and gone for the sappers of 3rd Platoon. SPC Robinson received a coin from CSM Beam for his exemplary appearance and knowledge during a guard mount inspection. SPC Cameron performed well at his promotion board on Tuesday and will soon join the ranks as a Non-Commissioned Officer.



The Dirty Deuce poses with winners of BN certificates



SPC Cameron prepares members of the platoon for formation in the company area

Headquarters Platoon stood up and picked up the company slack this week. SPC Letcher spent the week as the Operations NCO until the return of SFC Williams. Letcher said that he enjoyed his time as Ops NCO, but looks forward to concentrating on his job as armorer and driver. James Martin was promoted to Private First Class on the 7th, along with driving on several escort missions for LTC Idlet. All said and done, we are keeping busy and maintaining high spirits as we cross the halfway point in the deployment.

With another week under our belt, we are another week more experienced and another week closer to completing the mission. The Apache Sappers remind you keep thinking of them as they continue to Breach Hell!





B/9E: Outlaws

This week the Outlaws finally got back into the training cycle in a big way. At the last minute 1st Platoon was called on to perform a road cratering mission. The translation is that they made a pothole in the road the size of an olympic swimming pool. Engineers are truly happy when they get the opportunity to destroy something. The road was a possible route where illegal items were being smuggled into Kosovo. 1st Platoon didn't stop there, they continued to train the next day on wire road block obstacles in the rain and mud. Tomorrow, they will go back out and destroy the wire. I heard some of the guys saying that they are hoping for more bad weather! Today was a great day. Task Force 1-77 had an Organizational Day. All the officers in the company, while everyone else participated in the days activities. Wow, did they ever participate. They came in 1st, 2nd or 3rd place in just about every event. I got tired just running up to get all the awards. SPC Adams won 3 awards by himself. Here is a run down: M113 Tanker Bar Throw (1st Place), HMMWV Pull (1st Place), Tug of War (3rd Place), Sumo Wrestling (1st Place), Guidon Relay run (2nd Place), Road Wheel Relay (2nd Place), Pool Tournament (3rd Place), Team Golf (3rd Place), Stretcher Relay (1st Place), Horseshoes (3rd Place). In the overall competition, we came in 2nd Place missing 1st Place by 1 point. What can we say, the tankers had to change the method of scoring so they could keep their trophy. They knew that we would paint it Engineer Red. It was a great day out of the city.

God Bless,

CPT Bill Lash



1st Platoon finally gets to take a break after working all day on putting in a road crater in the German sector on the Macedonian boarder.



1st Platoon prepares the 40lbs Shape Charges on a small road used by smugglers. They have been smuggling in arms and munitions across the boarder on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.



SPC Miller works in the Outlaw TOC putting together numbers for CLS as well as prepping for EFMB.





C/9E: Dawgs of War

Another great week passes at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. We want to reassure everyone back home that all our Sappers are alive and well!!! We were not involved in the recent explosions here in the province of Kosovo. I would like to relay that the two sappers from B/54 Engineer battalion who were are in stable condition here at Camp Bondsteel.

This week we switched from Force Protection to our mission platoon and Quick Reaction Force cycle. The soldiers enjoy the break from the tedious tower guard duties and look forward to more challenging training and missions outside the base.

A&O started the week with a crater mission that closed off a trail from the FYROM border denying use of it to smugglers, illegal woodcutters and any potential insurgents, adding stability to Kosovo and FYROM. The mission was a huge success and a crater and complex timber and wire obstacle now blocks a mountain trail thanks to our soldiers' spectacular efforts. To build it they had to chip down through about three feet of rock in some places to emplace the charges! They ended the day with blistered hands, aching bodies, tired eyes and enormous smiles at a mission accomplished superbly!



Dawg Sappers working on emplacing shape charges



A&O soldiers pose inside their hard earned crater

ILT Christopher confers with the Germans on where to emplace the obstacle



A&O proofs their work with shape charges- everything looks good

We started the company change of command inventories with 1st Platoon conducting inventories first. After the inventories, SFC Cadena departed for ANCOC and SSG Villanueva filled in as platoon sergeant. In response to the explosions in Klokot, the MNB(E) Headquarters attached the platoon out in sector to help conduct patrols and traffic control points in the town in the hope that we will capture the culprits. The soldiers are extremely alert and motivated to make a difference out in sector.

Second Platoon used the Small Arms Visual Trainer (SAVT), a computerized firing range with weapons and lasers that simulate the M16 to a high degree of accuracy. They love it as it gives them a chance to sharpen their shooting and decision-making skills in the various scenarios. They have "shoot-no-shoot" and "urban combat" to name just a few scenarios and this allows the guys to practice at things that we have a hard time setting up a exercise for.

Today the Battalion Commander promoted CPL Tuthill to Sergeant. Sergeant Tuthill is looking forward to doing great things in 2nd platoon.

The company continues to improve, growing tighter as the rotation continues. I am deeply touched and never imagined commanding such a cohesive unit – it is such a blessing and a humbling experience to serve with such committed and great soldiers!!! I hope that you can understand how very proud you should be of your soldiers. They represent the best in the American people and the families that support them! God bless them every day and may God bless you too!

Dawg 6





A/94E: Warriors



The Warriors pose after a muddy battle of ultimate football



SGT Chase and crew work on grading the VCN Access Road



LTC Grosskruger, the 94E BN CDR, presents PFC Gambell with a Wolverine coin

“All in a Warrior’s Day”

As the days grow longer, the extended hours are being utilized to complete many projects throughout the region. After completing the Route Lion Bypass road project the Warriors had just enough time to conduct a good recovery to prepare for a slue of upcoming missions. We recently received three British soldiers that will be working with us for the next two weeks. They are working with us under a current exchange program established between the two engineer units.

SSG Brian Hancock accepted the challenge of upgrading the VCN Access road and moved out into the region with 14 Warriors and 2 British soldiers. SSG Hancock and his personnel deployed here with the thought of receiving an ample amount of stick time on their equipment, and it looks like they will get exactly that.

SSG Andrew Kenny has taken three of the construction-ready Third Squad and relocated to Gundolph Lines to assist in the building of a Mabey-Johnson bridge with our British engineer counterparts. Although the Mabey-Johnson bridge is not a daily routine for his squad, SSG Kenny ensures that the objective will be met to standard.

SSG Daisy’s squad has provided support to the 737 EOD in the removal of debris at an explosion site in the nearby town of Klokot. They have utilized all of their MOS specific skills and more. Having the opportunity to work alongside the EOD team was rewarding.

While all the construction is taking place somebody has to pull all the miscellaneous details together that filter through the net, so who better to step up to the plate than the mighty vertical squad. SSG Jesse Taitague’s squad has been overwhelmed with the opportunity to see some new countryside as they provide vehicle escorts for the Fighter Management Pass Program to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia. Balancing all the details at hand, the vertical squad still completed an area beautification project for their Maintenance section by building them a set of stairs for the PLL shed.

As the Warriors continue hosting LTC Grosskruger and CSM Landy on their visit to Kosovo, the sun sets on the Western horizon. The Warriors close out the week with pride knowing they have led the way by continuing to “shoot, move, and communicate” with professionalism and motivation.





737th EOD

This was a very busy week for Aftershock 737. Along with providing continued incident response to the entire MNB (E) (Multi-National-Brigade East) sector. The 737th also responded to five house bombings in the town of Klokot. EOD has personnel who are FBI / ATF trained on investigating post blast crime scenes, this expertise was utilized during search for evidence. This was a Task Force 9E effort utilizing equipment from A94 EN. A94 played a major role in pulling loose debris away from sites and making structures safe for EOD personnel to investigate the crime scene.

SSG Barrell and SSG Ayers also completed a partnership with the British this week. This partnership was very beneficial to our current situation of post blast investigation. They were able to gather useful information on post blast incidents in MNB (C) that related to our situation.

Also received a visit from MAJ Tyler (Planner JRTC for KFOR 5A rotation). Our unit was able to supply this planner with all information necessary to plan a successful rotation through JRTC for next the EOD unit scheduled to come here April 2003.

The unit reached its 90-day mark of this rotation.

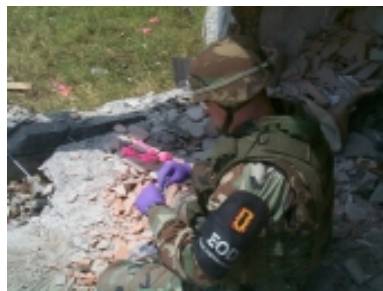
The unit continues to focus on mission requirements. The OPTEMPO remains steady. Vigilance and safety continue to be the unit's underlying priorities during all phases of this peacekeeping operation.

CPT Green



SSG Williams discusses post blast incident with Finland EOD team on site

SPC White recovers evidence from post blast site



SSG Blanchard prepares to make initial approach to post blast site in bomb suit



Two of the five houses involved in post blast incident



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I pray that everything is going well for you whether you are in Kosovo or the rear!!! As always, the soldiers of TF 9th ENG are doing a fantastic job here in Kosovo and setting a very high standard!!! We have quite a few activities, also, that have been planned to support and re-energize our soldiers. For example, we have trips to Bulgaria, a Prayer Breakfast each month, marriage classes each week, an upcoming Church Revival, and an upcoming Ruck March With God near the end of this month. In addition, we have weekly worship services, Bible studies, and choir practices. We are still planning many more things. I truly do believe that it is the will of God that we serve here in Kosovo!!! Great things, with eternal significance, are happening not only in the lives of the people of Kosovo, but also in the lives of our soldiers!!! Hebrews 10:36 reads, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." May God's will be done!!! God bless you all!!! (Remember that when prayers go up, blessings come down)

JAMES W. BLOUNT
Chaplain (CPT) USA
Battalion Chaplain



TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)

Scenes from KFOR 4A



CPT Stoll takes it to the hole!



CPT Pelham and SSG Rojas promote James Martin to Private First Class



A smiling Staff Sergeant Armas with the all-important turn-in paperwork in hand



ISG Thomas stresses defense, as the Gila Officers take a timeout during their game with 1-26 IN. LTC Idlet is in the background demonstrating the proper shooting technique.

Editor in Chief
The Gila Adjutant

TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)

